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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002277

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/09/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS I2

SUBJECT: JUNE 13 ISCI POLITICAL COMMITTEE DIALOGUE FOCUSES
ON U.S. COMMUNICATION WITH MARJAIYA

REF: BAGHDAD 1848 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In the fourth session of the ISCI-U.S. political committee on June 13, both sides agreed to review common objectives of the dialogue and at the next meeting come up with practical, concrete steps to achieve these shared goals. Discussions focused on improving communication between the U.S. and the marja'iya, which ISCI believes could lead to Najaf playing an important moderating role in the fight against extremism in Iraq. End summary.

Common Goals and Concrete Steps

¶2. (C) Vice President Adel Mehdi opened the meeting by calling for the political committee to come up with common goals and concrete steps to achieve them. He suggested that the next meeting focus on finalizing a list of shared objectives. PolCouns agreed.

Communication with the Marja'iya

¶3. (C) PolCouns asked the ISCI members to elaborate on their call in the last meeting for better USG communications with the marja'iya. Humam Hamoudi reiterated his view on the importance of transparency, saying the marja'iya gets conflicting messages from USG political leadership and commanders on the ground. If Najaf understood and was comfortable with U.S. strategy for the future in Iraq, it could use its influence to play a moderating role, he argued. Jalaladeen al-Sagheer said there were three requirements for the U.S. to gain the trust of the marja'iya: transparency of U.S. intentions; inclusion in decision making on issues that effect the Iraqi people; and consistency between stated policy and actions on the ground. Al-Sagheer complained that, based on what is happening on the streets of Diyala, for example, the U.S. is not implementing its policy coherently.

¶4. (C) "There may be a lack of information and communication on both sides," added the VP, explaining that Sistani has had good communications with President Bush and agrees with his convictions, "but that the field commanders behave contrary to stated U.S. policy." Adel Mehdi complained that U.S. forces were not neutral in their actions on the ground, and accused Coalition Forces (CF) of standing by while Shia were being eradicated from Diyala. PolCouns pointed out that what we are dealing with are perceptions of what is happening on the ground. U.S forces are not practicing a sectarian agenda, they confront any and all violence regardless of sectarian ties. PolCouns pointed out that the Sunnis also complain that they are being targeted unfairly.

¶5. (C) PolCouns noted that, unfortunately, U.S. communication with the marja'iya have so far been one way. The Embassy and MNF-I, she said, are open to any direct communications with elements of the marja'iya, with whatever discretion is required. On misperceptions in Diyala, PolCouns welcomed any concrete ideas or names of local leaders and CF could talk to who might help increase our understanding of the local dynamics; she suggested also raising this potential "localization of our dialogue" in Diyala with the U.S.-ISCI Security Committee as well. PolCouns said these are practical problems of communication which can be solved.

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